

Range/Grazing

How does the BLM determine if the range has deteriorated – is there sound science involved?

Yes, the BLM conducts monitoring of public lands for vegetation condition, forage and water availability and wildlife habitat condition. Extensive monitoring was completed in conjunction with the Reville Allotment Evaluation issued in 1999, and subsequent Addendums to the Evaluation in 2001. Additional monitoring has been ongoing through 2010. Monitoring included the collection of Ecological Site Inventory, Trend, Utilization, Use Pattern Mapping and Cover. The results of the monitoring indicated that downward trends are occurring, key perennial species are present in less than desirable levels and that wild horses have contributed to Resource Advisory Council (RAC) Standards for Rangeland Health not being met.

The Proposed Action in the Environmental Assessment is consistent with maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance between the wild horse population, wildlife, livestock and vegetation, and to protect the range from the deterioration associated with an overpopulation of wild horses.

For decades, the BLM has hired rangeland management specialists, wildlife biologists, as well as wild horse and burro specialists, whose expertise is used to monitor and assess rangeland conditions on public lands.

Rather than remove the horses, why doesn't the BLM eliminate or reduce livestock grazing?

Livestock grazing is evaluated for conformance with Standards for Rangeland Health and adjusted through appropriate decisions following coordination with the interested public and completion of Environmental Assessments

Congress made the decision to manage public lands for multiple use purposes, not just a single use.

While passing the 1971 Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act, the conference committee specifically stated that: *“The principal goal of this legislation is to provide for the protection of the animals from man and not the single use management of areas for the benefit of wild free-roaming horses and burros.”*

Congress affirmed its intent for multiple use when it passed 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act, requiring BLM to manage the public lands for a wide variety of uses (including livestock grazing) under the principles of multiple-use and sustained yield.

Livestock grazing is often seasonal in nature. The ranchers move them to various areas or completely off the range onto their own private lands. Horses stay on the range year round.

Ranchers supplement livestock grazing by hauling water. They may hold water rights to the area, and pump water that is also used by wild horses and wildlife. Closing public lands within HMAs to livestock grazing would not be a long term solution, and would not allow the BLM to greatly increase the number of wild horses on the range. At growth rates of 17-22% per year, it wouldn't be long before the BLM needed to remove excess horses.

To maintain healthy wild horse population and prevent range damage, we would be required to remove an even larger number of excess wild horses and burros each year.



Wild horses within the Reveille HMA, August 2009.

Why doesn't the BLM develop supplement the horses with food and water?

Under the 1971 Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act, we are required to manage wild horses and burros at the minimum feasible level of management. These are wild animals. It is not consistent with management at the minimum feasible level to provide supplemental feeds or rely on water developments that require frequent maintenance in order to maintain larger populations of wild horses and burros than the area can naturally support

However, we do supplement (haul) water during emergency situations, if necessary, and may develop or improve water sources within HMAs to improve distribution of the wild horses and promote resource improvement.

What data does the BLM use to establish Appropriate Management Levels?

The BLM determines the appropriate management level of wild horses and burros based on an ongoing program of monitoring over several years involving studies of grazing utilization, trend in range ecological condition, actual use, precipitation (climate), the results of land health assessments, and other factors.

The process generally begins with a management evaluation. Through the evaluation process, resource monitoring data is analyzed and a determination is made as to whether the current management and stocking levels for wild horses and/or burros (or livestock or wildlife) are achieving land health objectives.

If land health objectives are not being met, changes in management or stocking levels are proposed. The results of the BLM's analysis are documented in an environmental assessment which is provided to interested public for review and comment.

The BLM carefully considers the public's comments when making a final decision. The public is also provided with the opportunity to request administrative review if they disagree with the BLM's final decision.

How does the BLM determine when a gather to remove excess wild horses is needed?

The BLM monitors grazing utilization, trend in range condition, actual use, population data, and other factors to determine if excess animals are present and removal is necessary to restore the range to a thriving natural ecological balance and prevent a deterioration of the range.

What is a TNEB?

TNEB means Thriving Natural Ecological Balance. The goal of wild horse and burro management is to maintain a Thriving Natural Ecological Balance between wild horse and burro populations, wildlife, livestock and vegetation, and to protect the range from the deterioration associated with overpopulation of wild horses and burros.

To achieve a balance, wild horses and burros are managed to assure significant progress is made toward achieving land health standards for upland vegetation and riparian plant communities, watershed function, and habitat quality for animal populations. Wild horse and burro herd health is promoted by achieving and maintaining a thriving ecological balance.



Reville HMA, August 2009

What are the drought conditions like in this area?

Drought is a recurrent feature of arid Central Nevada. Drought should not be confused with aridity. Drought has been defined as a period when precipitation is less than 75% of the average amount (Society for Range Management 1989) while aridity refers to areas of low rainfall and is a permanent feature of climate. From 1944 to 1984 drought occurred in 17 out of 40 years in the southwestern United States (Holecheck and al. 1995). As of May 18, 2010, the U.S. Drought Monitor reflects “moderate drought” for central Nevada

www.drought.unl.edu/dm/monitor.html

A BLM rain gauge is located within the Reville Allotment and precipitation data has been collected at this location since 1985. Annual rainfall has ranged from 1.25 inches in 1986 to the maximum recorded precipitation of 9.56 inches in 2005. The average annual precipitation received through this time was 4.90 inches. During 6 years between 1985 and 2008, precipitation received met the definition of drought (<75% of average), and during 5 years, the precipitation was considered above normal (>125% of average). The precipitation patterns within the area demonstrate wide fluctuation. As a result, it is important to manage the resources within the Reville area conservatively so as to allow protection of vegetation resources and health of wildlife and wild horses through the poorest of years when drought can result in markedly reduced forage resources and water.

Is there livestock grazing in this area?

Yes, the Reveille HMA comprises approximately 16% of the Reveille Allotment. Livestock use takes place within and outside of the HMA.

Is the BLM removing excess wild horses and burros merely to increase livestock grazing use?

No. The fact is that there has been a 43 percent reduction in authorized livestock use on public lands since 1941.

Does wild horse overpopulation impact wildlife and plants?

Yes, it can. A wide variety of wildlife species common to the Great Basin ecosystem can be found in the Reveille HMA. These include coyote, black-tail jackrabbit, desert cottontail, bobcat, and numerous raptors, reptiles, and other small mammals. The area provides habitat for mule deer, and pronghorn on a seasonal or yearlong basis. BLM protects by policy, *special status* plant and animal species. The list includes certain species designated by the state of Nevada, as well as species designated as “sensitive” by the Nevada BLM State Director. As many as fifteen Special status species of bats and birds may utilize the proposed gather area for their habitat. Many species of migratory birds also utilize the area for portions their lives. As part of its multiple-use mission, the BLM is mandated to protect habitat to support these wildlife species.

Wild horses often graze the same area repeatedly throughout the year. Forage plants in those areas receive little rest from grazing pressure. Continuous grazing does not allow plants sufficient time to recover from grazing impacts. Such overgrazing results in reduced plant health, vigor, reproduction, and ultimately to a loss of native forage species from natural plant communities. Over time, this greatly diminishes habitat quality as abundance and long-term production of desired plant communities is compromised. If wild horse populations are not controlled in this area, forage utilization will exceed the capacity of the range.

Why don't you just make more land available to the horses?

The BLM would need approval from Congress to expand herd areas for wild horses. By law, wild horses can only be managed on areas of public lands where they were known to exist in 1971, at the time of the passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971.